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THE ARCHITECT

BY FRANK CAWS

Fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects

READ BEFORE THE NORTHERN ARCHITECTURAL ASSOCIATION
AT SUNDERLAND, 1ST DECEMBER 1894

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Incredible as it may seem, more than one member of our local professional brotherhood has pooch-pooched the employment, by the University Extension Society, of an amateur to lecture, throughout the present winter session, in this district on English Gothic. I am thankful to say this was not the spirit in which last year, in this very room, so many of us heard, with instruction and delight, Dr. Gibbon, of Shields, discourse so enthusiastically on the ancient architecture of Athens; and if proof were needed that the architects of the North-East have felt no sympathy with such silly conceitedness, it has been amply afforded by the considerable and increasingly interested numbers of architects, including principals, assistants, and pupils, who, together with the general public, have from the first continued to throng those most refreshing and instructive lectures which Mr. Cranage has given in Newcastle, Darlington, and Sunderland.

A few months ago, in his Address to the British Association at Oxford, Lord Salisbury told a galaxy of most eminent scientists that, whatever their advances in knowledge, and however great their seeming attainments, these were as nothing in comparison with the vast domain of mystery encompassing them on every side, and awaiting investigation by the restless mind of progressive man. It does, indeed, seem past belief that here, in this small corner of the world, anyone should be found who has persuaded himself that his acquaintance with that great and progressive art and science which we call Architecture is so perfect as to be incapable of being increased by the contributions of anyone whose note-paper is not stamped

"Architect," even though he be so able and devoted an archæologist as to be sent forth from one of the proudest of the world's educational capitals as a modern missionary of beauty and truth. As local architects, striving all we know, most of us, to earn an honest living, and suffering all the ills and miseries of modern competition, in which, as we everyone will agree, "the race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong," do we feel that our path is so bestrewn with roses that we need no refreshment for our souls? Living in these manufacturing centres, where use is the first and beauty is the last thing thought of, have the lines fallen to us in such pleasant places, and is our professional heritage so goodly, as to render us indifferent to the cheer and encouragement, to the refining aids and noble stimulus, of lectures, by whomsoever given, which bring before us afresh the architectural glories of the old days of mediæval romance, when use and beauty were so interwoven, in their humblest as well as noblest works and monuments, as to be almost indistinguishable the one from the other? I say we architects of this specially utilitarian corner of the kingdom, and in this unromantic age, need these reminders and examples to prevent our forgetting, in the struggle for subsistence, that we are all bound to struggle not less strenuously to realise in our works some small measure at least of the heritage of beauty bequeathed to us by the old masters, and of which great heritage I am sure every thoughtful member of our little brotherhood feels sadly unworthy.

I would fain express to the responsible directors of the University Extension movement the sense, which we share as architects, of the inestimable service rendered by these lectures of Mr. Cranage to the highest interests of the noble profession to which we have the honour to belong. This service has been rendered not only in refreshing those whose everyday duty calls them to design and carry out buildings, but also, and even more valuably, in arousing the latent interest of the public, and kindling by the torch of knowledge such a fire of local enthusiasm as will help to make this North country a less cold place for architects to work in for some time to come; for the influence of such an enthusiasm is often felt even when the lecturer and his audience have themselves passed quite away.

Who has not heard of "Philistia"? And who amongst

us, with love in our hearts for certain "canny auld toons" in which so much of our lives has been spent, and in which we have received so large a measure of the total sum of kindness that has fallen to our lot—I ask again, who of us has not felt uncomfortable and distressed when this "Philistia," on the lips or pens of certain public speakers or writers, seemed to be dangerously near emerging from the geographical mist which has so long enveloped it, and seemed on the point of finding a local habitation in which to set its despised name and detestable presence for evermore? But, brother architects, let me remind you that in olden days there were cultured men living in Athens, and there were ugly buildings there in plenty before the Propylæum, Thesæum, and Parthenon reared their stately heads, or were even dreamed of. Heaven knows what were the feelings of sons of Minerva, such as Ictinus and Phidias, in those days, or how cruelly conscious they may have felt of the pall of Philistine ugliness overspreading their beloved city. In Asia Minor and in Persia, as well as in Egypt, magnificent and lordly buildings had long sublimely assured these men that their own Athens might be made beautiful, too. But the time was not yet come. In the language of that day those great artists doubtless heard the opprobrium of ugliness applied to their beloved Athens by those old-world travellers and scholars who had seen Persepolis and Karnak in their prime. They had to endure this cross, and despise the shame of it, in the faith that the Soul which was in themselves would yet in some way take shape, and become for Athens a crown of beauty and a joy for all after time.

History tells us of the fierce opposition which Pericles, the champion of this faith of the Athenian artists, encountered from a narrow-minded utilitarian people, who believed that gold was better kept in the dark coffers of their treasury than lavished upon the temple and statues of Minerva. It is doubtful if in that struggle the sentiment of Art would have overcome the sentiment of economy, had not the Art of War, in which the people did see (or thought they saw) some use, formed an alliance with the Art of Beauty. The Propylæum, which was really a fortification, was the first fruit of this alliance or marriage, and served to pave the way for the still more glorious offspring which rose into existence soon after. Rome, too, had its early years of Philistian ugliness; and, though the great Augustus boasted he had found it a city of

brick and left it a city of marble, we know that that boast was only partially supported by fact, and that Rome was not built in the brief day of one emperor's life.

Who were the instruments of raising Rome and Athens from their Philistine rudeness to become the rival thrones of old-world classic glory? The architects. "Brief life is 'here our portion,'" and with some of us time has already sped too far on for us to feel much ground for hope that in certain cities (which we love for auld lang syne, and which we forbear to name) we may live to see the Philistine stone rolled away from the tomb wherein the deathless spirit which animates all nature—the spirit of the Beautiful—imprisoned, awaits a glorious resurrection. Some of us have watched and waited for the dawn. At times we have seemed to see the clouds lift from the earth's verge, and the rosy prospect of a bright and glorious rising has been hinted to our weary eyes. The time is not yet, however.

We have witnessed in Italy what we call the re-birth—the Italian Renaissance. Some of you here may be young enough to live to see, and to help create, a far grander sight—the Resurrection of English Architecture. The great Italians of the fifteenth century studied the ruins of pagan Rome. They used those prostrated stones as spring-boards, so to speak, from which they made their great leap into that beautiful modern architecture which we recognise as Italian. Is it not possible for the great young Englishmen of our time to study likewise the ruined temples of our own dear land; and, using these ruins as their spring-board, leap forth into new developments as characteristically English as the work of Raphael, Michelangelo, Palladio, Scamozzi, and Vignola was characteristically Italian? To the youngest among us this question must have the deepest interest; for to them may come the opportunity which their elders have either not possessed, or, possessing, have failed to use to the best advantage.

To the architect of the future this great future belongs; and, as the future is the inheritance of the young, I shall, by the indulgence of the older and maturer amongst us, address the remainder of my remarks to-night to our youngest members especially. If you would enter into this great future, you must become in reality, and not in name merely, architects. I will therefore now express to you, as well as I can in the short time remaining to me, the true architect as he appears to my vision.

Putting aside the question whether we, who in these days call ourselves architects, are really such or not, and sorrowfully admitting that John Ruskin had too much ground for daring in his famous Edinburgh lectures to assert that there were no architects in modern England, I will attempt to sketch in few words the outline of a great figure—the figure not of any man I see or know, but of one who stands before me ideally as properly entitled to rank as an *architect*.

We will begin with him as a boy, for if as a boy he is not already an architect uneducated, he cannot ever as a man become an architect educated. If the endowment is not in him at the first it cannot be drawn out of him at the last. But it would be a mistake to assume that, if the boy has it in him, he will necessarily show it at the first; that by no means follows. I could name in your ears to-night a celebrated architect still living—an architect whose work has been strongly influential in a modern development of taste and style. As a boy, poor and friendless, he found, fortunately, a kind master, who, moved by compassionate interest, took him as a pupil without premium. It is said the master was utterly disappointed with the boy's first performances, and felt sure he would never make an architect. Yet, by his brilliant subsequent career and world-wide reputation, the boy amply justified his master's love and falsified his fears.

In the soul of every human being God implants some love for the beautiful—together with some measure of appreciation of fact and necessity. However small the man's natural gifts in these two respects, they can be wonderfully strengthened and developed, like the muscles of one's limbs, by special cultivation and exercise. But, in order to become an architect worthy of the name, a boy must have at the start much more than the average measure of passion for the beautiful and of perception of the true, and, moreover, must cultivate these gifts with more than ordinary assiduity and more than common delight. Although it must be allowed that all that is true is beautiful, and all that is beautiful is true, yet, in the weakness of human nature and the finiteness of the human understanding, we recognise as a dual function the consciousness of the beautiful and the perception of the true. We shall therefore be better understood if we classify the natural gifts with which the born architect must be right royally endowed as the *Æsthetic* and the *Scientific*: or the

capacity for Fancy and for Fact. Under the term "scientific," or the capacity for appreciating *fact*, I include all those qualities of the mind which involve abundant measure of what is ordinarily styled "common-sense." We may also characterise these common-sense gifts of the young architect as the gift "practical," while we continue to speak of his inborn romance as the gift "æsthetic."

Here we arrive at a fair subject for discussion : Which of these two gifts, if either, should take precedence in the training and development of the boy architect ? I can hear one argue thus : " The practical education is the essential basis and framework, the very bone, of the architectural system, of which the æsthetic education supplies the "mere investiture or clothing of flesh." Well, yes ; a man is built of bone and flesh truly. But does Nature, in evolving a man, form first a completely ossified skeleton, and afterwards inclose it in flesh ? Is it not true that the newly-born have no hard bones in their bodies, and that complete ossification of the skeleton is the work of years ? Does not Nature herein teach us not to try to force the mind of the young boy architect to become severely practical before the proper time ? Do not all boys naturally become more practical as they grow older ? In this connection, however, it must be admitted that " circumstances " alter cases." One boy architect is pent in a dull manufacturing district where his whole environment is prose. Another learns his profession in a beautiful country town, or watering-place, surrounded by and embosomed in the æsthetic element. Obviously the same order of precedence of study is not properly applicable to both cases. The student's environment will generally sway the mind unduly in one of the two directions ; and though the environment is itself a providential element with which artificial interference may be carried too far, yet some special pains should be taken to counterbalance undue predominance of one kind of influence to the permanent stunting of the growth of the young mind in the other or opposite quality.

Not only environment calls for such corrective effort, but also natural proclivity stands equally in need of special regulation. That is to say, the boy who is too prosy should be urged on the æsthetic, and discouraged on the practical, side of his tastes ; and the one who seems too excessively romantic should be earnestly exhorted to become more practical. Still, after making every allowance for the

special circumstances of each case, I hold strongly that generally speaking, we should give precedence in youth to the poetic faculties, because they are the more sensitive to injury from discouragement and neglect; and in the order of nature their turn comes first. In the architect's boyhood it is "Now or never" with these æsthetic tastes and feelings. Solomon, who insisted that "there is a time "for everything," would urge the boy architect to rejoice now, in the days of his youth, in the pursuit of fancy, ere the days come and the years draw nigh when the more severe service of truth and fact set so strong a claim on the mental energies as to absorb not only time but inclination also.

Longfellow never wrote a truer or more beautiful line than this—"The thoughts of youth are long, long "thoughts." And it is generally, if not invariably, true that, as the English ship in her home port takes in coal enough to carry her across to the farther shore of the Atlantic, so in the home days of his pupilage, the spring-time and blossoming of life, the boy architect must take such a feast of fancy and such a store for his soul as shall carry him through the long voyage. Like the camel, he must gather by good rich browsing his hump, so that in the long march across the sandy wastes—which all too closely resemble many an architect's life and practice—he may feed upon the riches of his own mental and spiritual store already once assimilated. The hump I refer to as thus so desirable is not so much the hump of mere learning as the fulness and greatness of that human-divine gift which we call "soul." To cultivate, exercise, enlarge, strengthen, and refine this soul, he must not be kept for too many weary weeks together merely making plans and tracings of hideous rows of street houses or workmen's dwellings; nor at the squaring, day after day, of endless columns of duodecimals, nor in running to and fro perpetually to corporation officials about drains and middens; though it follows that attention to duty, however disagreeable, is of all lessons the one he must most thoroughly learn if he would preserve his soul's best self alive; and, moreover, the very dryness and distastefulness of some of his duties will serve as a foil to render all the more intensely enjoyable those of his studies which are of a more artistic complexion.

He must read noble and inspiring books; he must watch sunrises and sunsets; he must not spend all his

time poring indoors, nor half his time sporting out-of-doors. If he is first class at football he will not be likely to be first class at architecture. He must be meditative, wandering in the fields and on the sea-beach to fill his eyes and heart with the lovely coquetry of sunlight and shadow, and growing increasingly familiar with Nature's harmonies, discords, mysteries, and romances. He must frequent cathedrals, and learn to sit still in quiet churches. Frequent attendance at music-halls and theatres is calculated to excite unduly and artificially the taste for the beautiful, and to induce a mental unrest which renders the boy architect less in tune for his normal studies and observations. His taste should be based on the solid and the really enduring, rather than on the ephemeral creations of art and nature. Without being nervously anxious and overwrought, the young student must be quietly in earnest. The mental organism of the boy architect is to be so specially devoted to the service of beauty and truth that even in the innocent pleasures of the theatre, concert, or football field, indulged in to excess, he may deviate rather than refresh the energies of his brain and soul, and fail of attaining the standard of excellence which is the high mark he aims at.

Utilitarians may ask, Why should young architects, who will never have the ghost of a chance to build a cathedral, spend so much time and thought on cathedrals? Not that they may be equipped for designing cathedrals—though who can tell that they may not be called upon to do so?—but that they may become so imbued with the spirit of holy beauty that it may in the after years of their manhood inspire and pervade all their efforts, even in the designs which they are employed to make for much humbler buildings.

Similarly, the boy architect should be keenly alert to study the ever-changing glories of the sky, with "its gorgeous towers and cloud-capped palaces" of mist and flame; not that he may design and build moonrises or sunsets; but in order that his soul may be refreshed and strengthened to withstand the chill and deadness, the blight and mildew, with which too often a money-grubbing and rabidly utilitarian age infects the young and unfilled spirit, robbing enthusiasm of its edge and cankering its brightness. In this workaday world the boy architect must needs, by communion with all that is nobly ideal in literature, art, and nature so confirm his own inborn

idealism that he may to the end of his career continue to be a great dreamer as well as a great realiser. No man who is not a dreamer is, or can be, an architect. What are the cathedral aisles but long-drawn dreams in stone? Yes, they are dreams, truly. But, before they could be embodied in solid stone, their mediæval architects had to do a great deal besides dreaming.

Before the boy architect can express in any way his dreams, he has to do a great deal, too. He must learn to express what he feels. Let him attempt to do so while as yet his eye is not skilled to instruct his hand, and while as yet his ear has not learnt to direct his tongue. He will turn away disgusted from the traces of his hand, or the words of his tongue, feeling that they render hideous and abortive the dream which, unexpressed, seemed so intensely beautiful. The proper medium of expression which the young architect must bring into subjection to his thought is not the tongue, but the hand; not the word, but the line. All his dream-power, let him strengthen and refresh it as he may, will be wasted if he does not at the very beginning learn to draw. What the alphabet is to the would-be reader, that drawing is to the would-be architect. The very act of expression increases the faculty of conception; and if there be no power of expression the faculty of conception itself must flicker and fail, as a candle deprived of air. Some of the greatest orators have known only their mother-tongue. Likewise, some of the greatest architects have been proficient only with the pencil and pen. But if the architect is able also to draw with brush and colour, with modelling-tool and clay, and with carving-blade and wood, so much the better; just as the linguist-orator is better furnished than he who is master only of one language.

Before the young architect can hope to draw his dream which is unseen, he must learn to correctly portray the dreams of other architects which have been petrified into solid substance and visible forms. No power of imagination, no strength of conception, can compensate the architect for weakness or non-proficiency in the art of drawing. The young architect should talk little and draw much. He should have no mercy on himself short of acquiring that absolute harmony and working understanding between eye and hand by which alone his thoughts can take shape and permanency.

And yet a man, be he never so great a dreamer and consummate a draughtsman, if he be no more than that, though an artist, is not an architect. Having by severe self-criticism (an essential habit to the successful student), and by untiring, dogged perseverance become at a comparatively early stage of his education an accomplished draughtsman, the young architect, during that same period of preliminary training, must necessarily have become proficient in the science and practice of linear perspective—for to this extent at least the bones, so to speak, must grow along with the flesh in the youth's professional development. By the way, referring to perspective, let me offer you what is, I think, an unfailing gauge of a genuine architect, as distinguishing him from one who is an architect only in name.

The genuine architect always "thinks" in "perspective." But the youth who, on becoming an able perspective draughtsman and a dreamer, rests content with such attainment, as many do, whatever else he may or may not be, is not an architect. And it may be asked, if he, like a modern Piranesi, draw beautiful and noble designs of his own on paper, does not that constitute him an architect, even though those designs be never realised? And here is more food for discussion. If the designs drawn on paper contain reasonably conclusive internal evidence of the possession by their designer of the constructive genius and knowledge of practical matters necessary to carry them into actual effect, then, I submit, the mere ill-fortune of the lack of opportunity to realise them bars not the designer from his just claim to rank as an architect. Indeed, is it not well known that the noblest of architectural designs are amongst those which have never been built? For, as Burns says, "the best laid schemes o' mice and men gang aft agley."

But the youth who, having devoted his earlier years of training almost exclusively, or mainly, to the development of his æsthetic nature and to the art of draughtsmanship, fully conversant with many beautiful forms of structure and ornament, and understanding the artistic principles of proportion, composition, and design, would now become more than ever conscious that, in order to transfer his dreams from paper to timber, brick, iron, and stone, he must further learn how to draw, so to speak, with the plane, trowel, hammer, and chisel, his pictures in the open air by the hands of the carpenter, bricklayer, smith, and

mason. Only so can he plant upon the earth his dream in a substantial, enduring structure, such as shall stand representing him when he himself has passed into the dreamland and is seen on earth no more.

To do this he must acquire practical and scientific knowledge. He must become a geometrician and mathematician. He must also become a man of business. The motive is sufficient. His æsthetic tastes render these sterner attainments in themselves unattractive. But he is now almost a man. The process of ossification is, in a mental sense, advancing in his case, and in every way his condition and inducements render him increasingly anxious, and eventually keenly determined, to master all practical qualifications essential to the completion of his professional equipment. He is like a man who would naturally fight shy of religion, but who, when he feels conscious that his present and future happiness depends on it, begins as never before to "hunger and thirst after righteousness."

Thus in the case of the young-man architect necessity is not only the mother of his inventions, but also the spur and appetiser for the study of those constructive principles and details, and of those practical facts and methods, failing his knowledge of which his ideal creations cannot be realised. Content no longer to remain a mere dreamer of dreams, a mere paper architect, he would become a stalwart entity. He understands now the true mission and vocation of the architect, and he will not rest till he is every way qualified to fulfil it. Geometry, mathematics, chemistry, statics, dynamics, geology, are sciences for the lack of which he feels he is, more or less, lame and halt and purblind. He has no notion of limping through his professional career on crazy crutches by the rule of thumb. He is an artist already. He would become an engineer also ; because he has come to feel that artist + engineer = architect ; that this is a true equation, and that nothing short of perfect artist + perfect engineer can constitute the perfect architect. He understands that the true architect is the priest whose high vocation it is to wed Fancy to Fact, to unite Beauty to Utility. No longer satisfied with a one-sided view of human life, he sees it to be not purely poetic nor simply utilitarian. For, as the bird has two wings, so life has two functions, both of which are actually embodied and fulfilled in the life of the genuine architect.

To the young-man architect holding these views, and

thus fully equipped to sustain the high calling of his choice, flowers have become the more lovely from his knowledge of their geometry ; the forms and combinations of flying-buttresses, groined vault, and pinnacle are none the less romantic from his ability to accurately estimate their mutual static effects on each other and on the building as a whole to which they belong. The beam, which possessed in itself no beauty or fascination whatever to his merely poetic ken, is now become full of profound interest, since he has learnt its secrets of stiffness, elasticity, and strength. The arch, at all times grand, becomes still more impressive in view of the complex problems involved in its stability ; and the interminable network of far-stretching lattice of wide-span roof or bridge, ceasing to mystify and perplex, serves now to arouse his keenest intellectual faculties, as he dissects and disentangles their forms, weights, proportions, scantlings, and fastenings in relation to their stresses and strains under varying conditions of load, temperature, wind, and snow.

Till now the young-man architect was a dreamer. Now he has become a *doer*. Henceforth there is no fear of his lapsing into the mere dream-life of the artist or paper architect. The danger rather is that the fascination of pursuing the manlier functions of the engineering part of his profession may render him a mere materialist, the ideal being overshadowed and absorbed in the real. He is now therefore called upon, for the remainder of his career, to be on his guard against allowing either of the functions of his dual nature and office to get out of proportion and adjustment, and usurp the rights of the other.

It is a question of focus. So long as he succeeds in so governing and balancing the two influences of which his work is the outcome, he remains an architect. That is to say, so long as he continues to both dream and build he remains a creator. So long as he could only dream he was an impotent ghost. When he could both dream and draw he became what the theosophist would call " an astral body," an artist—*i.e.* a cross between a ghost and a man ! But when he could dream, draw, and build ; and could, moreover, continue to do so, maintaining, in spite of the materialising influences and the commercial duties of his daily life as a busy man of affairs, the proper balance and equipoise of all his natural endowments and accomplishments, he is, and remains, at least in my regard, that most completely developed man, of all sorts and conditions of men, he Architect !



